

Record number of travelers expected this season

More than 103 million Americans—the most on record—are expected to travel for the year-end holidays, according to AAA.

This represents a 1.5 percent increase, or 1.5 million more people traveling, compared with last year. This comes despite one fewer travel day this holiday season. The year-end holiday travel period is defined as Dec. 23 to Jan. 2.

The increase in holiday travel this year is being driven by additional consumer spending, a result of improvements in the labor market and rising wages. Additionally, low gas prices and increased consumer optimism will prompt more Americans than ever to set out on road trips, take to the skies, or board trains, buses and cruise ships to celebrate the holidays.

The vast majority of travelers—93.6 million people—will take a holiday road trip, an increase of 1.5 percent over last year. Air travel is expected to increase by 2.5 percent, with more than 6 million Americans flying to their holiday destinations. Travel by other modes of transportation, including cruises, trains and buses, will decrease slightly, to 3.5 million travelers.

Intricacies of snowmaking

rival Ma Nature



Snowmaking is integral to Northstar's desires to provide enough terrain for all ability levels. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – It looks like Jim Larmore is playing a sophisticated video game on his phone. But this is no game. As director of mountain operations at Northstar Larmore oversees the entire snowmaking operation.

He is essentially Father Nature. When Mother Nature doesn't deliver snow, Larmore and his gang do.

Many of the pumps and guns are at his fingertips via his phone.

"If I had to do everything manually, it would be too tough," Larmore told *Lake Tahoe News*.



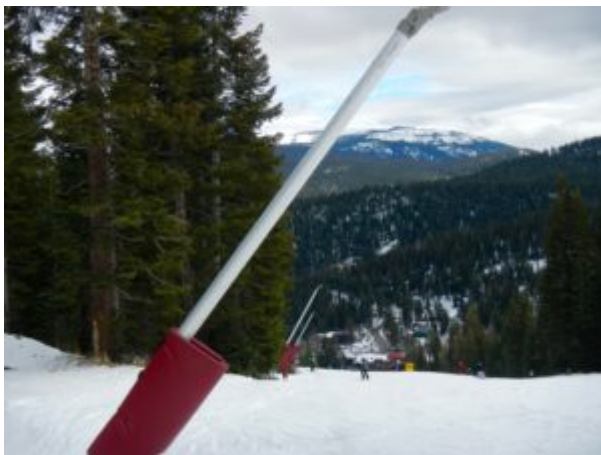
Jim Larmore is able to control snowmaking at Norhstar with his phone. Photo/Kathryn reed

Looking at the mountain Larmore knows there is more to do. But on this first day of winter he's more than satisfied with the coverage. Each day more terrain opens. On Wednesday it was Logger's Loop; today it could be Castle Peak.

Knowing the mountains suffered a rain on snow event in the last week one might think the conditions are nasty. Just the opposite. Snowmaking and grooming can do wonders to ski slopes. Snow is often moved around fill in spots.



Snowmaking equipment comes in various sizes. Photos/Kathryn Reed



And the consistency no longer resembles something that came out of a high school science project. Most of the time it's hard to tell Mother Nature didn't create it.

Snowmaking can be a 24-hour endeavor. Mostly, though, a cadre of workers are on the job when the public is long gone. Larmore says it takes someone who embraces the outdoors, doesn't mind getting wet and likes physical labor.

Scattered about the ski resort are an array of snowmaking guns. Some operate on air and water, some don't have any air.

Newer ones can use less than half the energy of older models, but they don't blow as much white stuff.

With at least half of them being automated, it means a more consistent quality is guaranteed. They turn on and off based on the temperature.

This is a huge change from the old days when the crew would sling pumps and hoses over their shoulders and walk all the equipment to the slopes.

Today the devices are too big to even contemplate doing that.

It's a balancing act to get enough varied terrain open to cater to the diverse group of skiers who come to this resort just outside the Lake Tahoe Basin. While the ultimate goal is to provide the best guest experience possible, it's not as easy as flipping a switch and suddenly there is snow.

There's the big picture plan of what staff wants to have covered at various times in the season, and then there are the daily snowmaking plans that get down to the nitty gritty. And even those plans are fluid because nothing is constant. Temperatures and humidity – the key factors in when to blow – are constantly monitored.

South facing slopes, high traffic areas and lower terrain need more help.

An advantage Northstar has over some other resorts is that it isn't that rocky. This means less snow – real or manmade – is needed to ski on because it doesn't take that much to cover grass.

Northstar has the capacity to cover 50 percent of its runs.

The water to make the snow comes from Sawmill Reservoir, which is on the mountain beyond the Nordic center. It's estimated that 86 percent of manmade snow returns to the aquifer.

If it weren't for snowmaking during recent winters, there would not have been a ski season.

"We did quite well during the drought," Larmore said. "But it's better for everyone if it snows."

Opinion: Is anyone in EDC government reading?

By Larry Weitzman

At the Dec. 13 El Dorado County Board of Supervisors meeting, Item 32 was on the calendar for the receiving and filing of 11 five-year studies required for 11 special districts that collect fees pursuant to Government Code Sections 66000 to 66025, otherwise known as the Mitigation Fee Act.

As has been reported there is current litigation regarding EDC's failure to have these reports prepared and filed in a timely manner. The consequence for this failure according to the code sections and pursuant to the recent Fourth District Court of Appeals case of Walker v. city of San Clemente which has become the law in California is the refund of all unexpended fees in the MFA accounts held by the County to the current property owners of record of property upon which those fees were assessed.



Larry Weitzman

I have studied all of the documents filed by the CAO's office for this meeting including the resolutions for each district and the purported five-year findings. At the hearing an employee from the CAO's office gave the BOS an explanation on how these documents were prepared. She said she gave the various special districts a template for doing their five-year studies and for all the districts, save for the EDH Fire, Rescue Fire and Cameron Park CSD Parks and Fire, they essentially filed the same page and a half, five-year nexus study. I have learned that county counsel was involved in the preparation of this template.

From the language of this template which is entitled Mitigation Fee Act 5-Year Report the reports for the Diamond Springs Fire, Pioneer Fire, Lake Valley Fire, Mosquito Fire, Garden Valley Fire, Georgetown Fire are almost identical and don't meet the requirements of the MFA, especially pursuant to GCS 66001 (d) (1) (b) which says in part: "the local agency (which is El Dorado County as stated by County Counsel at the same meeting) shall make the following findings with respect to that portion of the account or fund remaining unexpended, whether committed or uncommitted: (B) Demonstrate a reasonable relationship between the fee and the purpose for which it is charged."

There is more to this entire Government Code Section, but I want to concentrate on that one requirement and the word "demonstrate." But first we need to understand what the MFA is all about. It was created about 30 years ago to help local jurisdictions pay for future improvements, such as roads, parks and fire protection, caused by real estate development. No problem there. But it is for future needs caused by development, not maintenance of existing facilities. If a developer builds 1,000 new homes, you might need a new fire station and a park or two. That's the purpose of the MFA. But

once built, the money cannot be used for the maintenance or staffing of same. The MFA allows the charging of a fee for each building permit to pay for those things.

But to protect the taxpayers, the MFA put in a five-year finding requirement of which the findings as per subparagraph (B) says to keep collecting the fees the agency has to "demonstrate" a reasonable relationship between the fee and the purpose for which it is charged.

After reading the aforementioned five-year fire district reports, it is obvious that no one, including our \$250,000 a year county counsel read the language in the statute. Here is the entire paragraph B from the Mosquito Fire report (it corresponds to the requirement of paragraph B of the statute) which is almost identical for all intent and purposes to the other five-year reports:

"There is a reasonable relationship between the fee and the purpose for which it is charged, as defined below:

New development will create additional demand on the District's fire protection and emergency response services, requiring additional facilities and equipment and more frequent replacement of existing equipment to meet the increased demand (spelling corrected) while maintaining the current level of service."

The foregoing paragraph is hardly a demonstration of a reasonable relationship between the fee and the purpose for which it is charged. There are no demographics, growth studies, need studies based on new development whatsoever. All seven of the small districts, Rescue included didn't attempt to demonstrate the reasonable relationship between the fee and the purpose. For Rescue, there was a 34-page study, but when it came to that same issue, there was a short paragraph saying the same thing above. But it did correctly state on page 24 of the "study" "Fee revenue may not be used to fund operational,

maintenance or repair costs.”

Cameron Park CSD for Parks and Fire used an in-house resolution of the CSD in an attempt to say they did a five-year Nexus study and then attached some financial data meeting the requirements of the completely separate annual report required by GCS 66006 which has nothing to do with the requirements of GCS 66001 (d) (1) and (2). It is almost unbelievable. Perhaps that is why less and less people trust the administrative aspect of their government.

Our new CAO is attempting to comply with the MFA, but what was done at the BOS meeting on December 13, 2016 doesn't cut it. Our CAO is well educated with a Master's degree and he is a bright guy and is trying like gangbusters to straighten out EDC. Politics makes that difficult. But for purposes of complying with the laws including the MFA we have a County Counsel and a staff of about a dozen lawyers. Other counties are now complying with the MFA, why can't EDC? This issue of not filing the appropriate reports was brought to EDC's attention three and a half years ago, and still the problem is not solved. The County has filed appropriate studies in the past, why not now? The reports that have been filed will not stand up to scrutiny. Even EDH Fire who filed what appears to be an appropriate Nexus study also has a problem. The report is not current but was prepared almost four years ago as it is dated 2013-2018 and according to the cover page was adopted Oct. 17, 2013, hardly a current study. EDC deserves better legal representation. That might be a good start.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Time for homeopathic remedies to prove they work?

By Erin Ross, NPR

Homeopathy has been around since the 1700s, but despite having devoted followers, there is no scientific evidence that it works. Soon, packages for homeopathic products might say just that.

Last month, the Federal Trade Commission released an enforcement policy statement about labeling for over-the-counter homeopathic products. Homeopathic treatments have increasingly been marketed in drug store and supermarket aisles, alongside Food and Drug Administration-approved over-the-counter medications like Tylenol and Mucinex.

Some homeopathic remedies have disclaimers that say their products aren't regulated by the FDA. Some don't have any disclaimers at all. One product even claims that homeopathic remedies are regulated just like other medicines, which is not true.

[Read the whole story](#)

Graduation rate in Nev. improves slightly

By Associated Press

State officials say Nevada's public high school graduation rate is up almost 3 percentage points from the previous year.

The Nevada Department of Education says the graduation rate for the class of 2016 is 73.6 percent. That's up from 70.8 percent in 2015.

More than 1,000 more Nevada students graduated high school in 2016 compared with 2015.

English language learners were the group that showed the greatest improvement. Their graduation rate rose 10 percentage points, even though it remains one of the lowest among subgroups in the state at about 42.6 percent.

Nevada's graduation rate is one of the worst in the country and beat only New Mexico and the District of Columbia last year.

But state Superintendent Steve Canavero says Nevada is on track to become the fastest-improving state.

Beyond 'pinking it': Women's skis evolve

By Elisabeth Vincentelli, CNN

For a long time, women's skis suffered from a phenomenon known as "pink it and shrink it": take a men's model, make it shorter (and softer) and give it a pastel top sheet.

Thankfully we've come a long way since. The offerings have improved and last season the best-selling ski in specialty shops was the Black Pearl from Blizzard – the first time a women's ski had ever topped the overall list.

In Lake Tahoe, Jen Gurecki took matters into her own hands and

three years ago introduced Coalition Snow, the only women's ski and snowboard manufacturer in the U.S.

"An expert woman could purchase a men's ski, but wouldn't you want to have more options?" Gurecki says. "You can also choose to support businesses that are overtly pro-women. All of that aside, we make f---ng good skis!"

Read the whole story

Nev. in program to reduce prison solitary confinement

By Sandra Chereb, Las Vegas Review-Journal

CARSON CITY — Nevada is one of five states that were chosen to work with the Vera Institute of Justice on ways to reduce the use of solitary confinement in the state prison system, the Department of Corrections said Tuesday.

"With Vera's assistance, Nevada will be better-equipped to both reduce reliance on segregation and improve the ways it is used, with the goal of preparing inmates for success when they return to our communities," James Dzurenda, director of the Nevada Department of Corrections, said in a statement. "This opportunity is directly in line with the mission of the department, will encourage positive development and needed reform, and will boost safety inside and outside prison walls."

Nevada's prison population, estimated at 14,000, ballooned beyond projections in recent years.

Read the whole story

Center opens in Truckee for athletes with disabilities

The Craig Empowerment Center, an 800-square-foot addition to the CR Johnson Healing Center in Truckee, opened this week.

The center not only adds space and top-of-the-line training equipment, but also provides additional training resources from Craig's specialized therapy staff.

The CR Johnson Healing Center is a training facility that provides resources for athletes in recovery from life-altering and sport-related injuries. The Healing Center attracts more than 3,700 visits a year from community members and athletes supported by the High Fives Foundation, a nonprofit organization that raises injury prevention awareness while providing resources and inspiration to those who have sustained life-altering injuries.

The addition of the Craig Empowerment Center gives athletes unique access to important strength-training technologies such as the FES Bike, Freemotion EXT Dual Cable and Parallel Bars, and gives them more space for important workouts.

The Craig Empowerment Center is available to High Fives athletes and the local community.

Rate hike on Jan. 1 for Liberty Utilities customers

It's going to cost Liberty Utilities customers more to keep the lights on and heat their homes and offices starting Jan. 1.

Average residential and small commercial customers will see an increase of less than 1 percent, while average medium and large commercial customers will see increases of approximately 16 percent and 17 percent, respectively.

An average residential monthly use is 602 kWh, average small commercial is 1,843 kWh, average medium commercial is 22,391 kWh, and average large commercial is 196,726 kWh.

The rate adjustment are the result of two major projects:

- Luning solar project is a 50 MW solar installation located in Mineral County in Nevada. Once it is put into service in first quarter of 2017, it will supply about 25 percent of Liberty customers' energy needs.
- The first phase of the 650 electric line upgrade was completed this fall. It consists primarily of upgrading and replacing an aging power line between Truckee and Kings Beach to improve reliability.

Other system improvements were made in Alpine and Mono counties, as well as the Portola area.

Liberty's annual investment of \$2.5 million in vegetation management also contributed to the overall rate increase. Projects include trimming trees and branches around structures to reduce outage and fire-related risks.

For more information about the rate increases, go **online**.

Magnet School kindergarten lottery about to open

Starting Jan. 9 Lake Tahoe Environmental Science Magnet School will begin taking names for the fall 2017 line-up of kindergartners.

Parents of students who will turn 5 on or before Sept. 1, 2017, may fill out a “Kindergarten Enrollment Request Form” at the school office or **online**. This a lottery. Forms are due at the end of March.

The transitional kinder program at Tahoe Valley School is available for those who turn 5 after Sept. 1.

For more info, email mtruszcwski@ltusd.org.